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Accused of sexual assault or a victim?

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Abstract

Accusations of sexual assault are very disputed in today's society. It is a sensitive subject which deserves to be treated with respect, since the alleged crimes are of a dire nature. Since the rise of the social movement #MeToo, women all over the world have shared their experiences of sexual assault. It has resulted in many famous men being publicly accused. These women have been publicly commended for their bravery and their strength. However, it has also resulted in many people who are angry and who claim that these men are innocent, the men themselves often among those. Comedian Soran Ismail was during 2017 accused of sexual assault by several women. The investigations around these accusations were shut down due to lack of evidence or because the statute of limitations had expired. Swedish national television broadcaster, Sveriges Television (SVT) produced a documentary called *Persona Non Grata* which depicts Ismail's perspective of this. This essay explores if and in what ways SVT portrays Ismail as a victim. It adheres to a theoretical framework produced with the help of professor and author Sarah Banet-Weiser and authors Kate Manne and Alison Phipps. These women all explore how men accused of sexual assault are depicted as victims. The methods used are a narrative analysis and a content analysis in accordance with the book on research methods by Bergström & Boréus.

Key words: Ismail, victim, #MeToo, sexual assault, SVT

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1 Introduction

In 2017 the Swedish comedian Soran Ismail was accused of sexual assault and rape by several different women. None of these accusations were taken any further, either because the preliminary investigation was shut down due to lack of evidence or because the statute of limitations on the crime had expired. Swedish national television broadcaster, Sveriges Television (SVT) has made a two-part documentary called *Persona Non Grata* which explores how these accusations have affected Ismail. It depicts a person who is accused but not convicted.

Comedian Bianca Kronlöf posted a video that went viral on the social media platform Instagram a while after the documentary aired where she strongly criticizes the documentary for not dealing with what she thinks is the real issue, namely Ismail's view of women and of sexual consent. Kronlöf is not alone in her criticism of the documentary. It has been very debated among the public ever since it aired. It is through watching Kronlöf's video as well as reading about the documentary on different social media platforms that I have decided to analyze the documentary.

It's very hard to convict someone of any crime of a sexual nature as evidence is hard to obtain. This leads to an uncertainty in whether the accused is guilty or not. I have many times heard people take the accused man's side, and that they don't believe the woman who accused him. In the cases where the man actually is guilty, this is devastating. This has angered me for a long time, and made me vigilant when people are quick to take the accused's side. It also makes me critical of the media's portrayal of these men, as the media has the power to intentionally portray something in a certain way. The media has the power to not show the whole picture. I do not claim to know whether Ismail is guilty or not and that is not what this essay is about. In the eyes of the law a person is innocent until proven guilty. This is important and crucial in order to obtain a fair and just society. As Ismail's has not been convicted of any crime it is important to state that he is innocent. This essay does not aim to explore his guilt nor his innocence. It aims to explore the media's portrayal of someone who has not been convicted, who has neither been proven innocent nor guilty in a court of law. SVT has provided the public with the accused's perspective. What happens when only one side of the story is portrayed, is that even though the accusations haven't gone to court, the public can start to make up its own mind. If the public is only provided with the

accused's perspective, and if this perspective is one of victimhood, then it can be easier to believe that the accused is innocent.

This leads me into the power of the media. The media has the power to influence the judgement of society as they can portray something in a certain way. They can choose what picture to paint, what words to print and what story to share. The media has a big influence over society, and as it for many is the only source through which they learn about current events, it holds a big responsibility to do these current events justice in the portrayal of them. It can affect how people behave and what norms are set as standard. Therefore it is very important that the norms adhere to a fair treatment of all people. If it is conveyed in the media that a woman who accused a man of sexual assault isn't worth her own perspective, then what message is sent out? How does this project onto people and how does it affect how women are treated in our society? If we learn that someone who allegedly experienced sexual assault does not get their story shared, even if they don't wish to share it themselves or to be mentioned by name, do we not learn that that side of the story is not important? If we are prepared to, without a trial, believe the accused to be a victim, to be innocent even perhaps, why are we not prepared to believe the same about the one accusing. These are important questions to reflect upon in order to further the fight for the rights of those who have been sexually assaulted. They encourage a respect for the story of the assaulted, and in that a respect for their rights and ultimately for human rights. The media must avoid to tip the scale in a certain direction. They must maintain impartiality, out of respect for the matter at hand.

There are a few articles available at Swedish newspaper Expressen as well as on SVT that criticize the documentary for angling it in favour of Ismail. One of these articles is written by Jens Liljestränd who partakes in the documentary as a sort of third part, who observes and commentates what has happened. In this article he claims that his statements and what he has said has been angled or in some cases removed all together. He says that he remembers speaking about that the stigma around accusing someone of rape is just as horrible for the person who accused as for the accused, and that “those type of comments are removed in what came to be only about Ismail's struggle to overcome the deplatformation that happened to him and to recapture the stage again.”¹ The other article is written about one of the women

¹ Original quote: “den sortens kommentarer är bortklippta i det som nu enbart kom att handla om Ismails kamp för att övervinna den deplatformering som drabbat honom och återerövra scenen”
Liljestränd, Jens. Vi män kommer alltid billigt undan. *Expressen*. 2021-04-20.
<https://www.expressen.se/kultur/jens-liljestrand/vi-man-kommer-alltid-billigt-undan/> (Accessed 2021-12-10)

who accused Ismail. She “experienced that SVT did not want to include her perspective of what happened”² and that in contrast to what the documentary claims she never got the question about participating.³ These articles also contributed to me wanting to explore this subject of how men accused of sexual assault are portrayed as victims.

1.1 Question and purpose

The purpose of this essay is to examine and explore the depiction of men who are accused of sexual assault in Swedish media. I will discuss in what ways I see these men being portrayed as victims in the media. In order to specify the purpose I have chosen to analyze the documentary *Persona Non Grata* as I have found these tendencies of claiming victimhood in it. I have chosen to use this documentary as it has received a lot of attention in the media and as it has been a subject of discussion in social media. I will only analyse *Persona Non Grata* as it portrays a man who is accused of sexual assault and as it is a documentary made by one of Sweden’s largest TV companies. Thus, it covers the focus of my essay. I found it advantageous to limit myself to only analyzing one piece of material as it allows my research question to be more narrow and therefore easier to attempt to answer. My research question is:

- Does SVT depict Soran Ismail as a victim in the documentary *Persona Non Grata* and if so, how?

1.2 Primary and secondary material, and its limitations

My primary source for this essay is the documentary *Persona Non Grata* which aired on SVT in early 2021. The documentary aired in two parts. It depicts Ismail’s life after he was accused of sexual assault. It provides an insight into his private life with his partner and baby. A lot of the documentary is filmed in their apartment and his partner is interviewed several times, giving her perspective on things. The documentary also shows Ismail trying to get back on stage and once again working as a comedian.

² Original quote: “upplevde det som att SVT inte ville ha med hennes bild av vad som skett” Silverberg, Josefin. Kvinna som anmälde Soran Ismail kritisk: inte offrens perspektiv. *SVT*. 2021-04-09. <https://www.svt.se/kultur/kvinna-som-anmalde-soran-ismail-kritisk-inte-offrens-perspektiv> (Accessed 2021-12-10)

³ Ibid.

My research question involves analyzing this particular documentary, and thus it constitutes the only primary material for the essay. As I said, having only one piece of primary material will aid me in achieving a precise and narrow question. The usage of such limited primary material will mean that it will not be possible to generalize the results, but rather only find results and conclusions which apply solely to this particular documentary. I deemed this amount of material a suitable amount and have thus not included any further primary material for the sake of finishing the essay within a reasonable time span.

Furthermore the essay uses several secondary sources. These firstly include the previous research which I have gone through in preparation of the essay. The previous research for this essay consists of three articles. Two of these articles focus on #MeToo and how it has been used and portrayed in the media, with much focus on social media. The third article focuses more on how men accused or convicted of sexual assault are portrayed as victims either by themselves or by relatives or the media. I find these articles a relevant complement to my knowledge on the subject.

My secondary material also includes the articles and books which together make up my theoretical framework for the essay which will be presented below. My theoretical framework is based on two books and one article. These are the article 'Ruined' Lives: Mediated white male victimhood' by Sarah Banet-Weiser, the book 'Me, Not You' by Alison Phipps as well as the book 'Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny' by Kate Manne. The secondary material also contains some news articles where participants of the documentary have expressed their thoughts about it.

As my material is almost exclusively in Swedish I choose to translate quotes and citations in order to obtain a more coherent essay. I am including the original quotes, in the original language, in the footnotes for added transparency. Other than the translation the quotes will be cited without modifications.

1.2.1 Information evaluation

In this section I am assessing the credibility of my material. Something which strongly increases credibility is when the material is peer reviewed.

My primary material, the documentary *Persona Non Grata*, is produced by the largest Swedish public broadcasting company, SVT. SVT is behind most of the big news channels in Sweden, it has no commercials and it is labeled a public service. These properties decrease the risk of SVT being used in order to make a profit and it means that SVT's aim is to provide a reliable news source to the public of Sweden. Even though I am critically assessing SVT in this essay, I do with the above information, deem it a reliable source of information. This is mostly due to the fact that it reaches a large portion of the Swedish population and because it is seen as a reliable news source by most of the population.

The articles 'Ruined' Lives - Mediated white male victimhood' and '#MeToo; #HimToo: Popular Feminism and Hashtag Activism in the Kavanaugh Hearings' which are used as previous research, are both peer reviewed articles. The author of 'Ruined' Lives - Mediated white male victimhood' is a professor which suggests that she has great knowledge in her field of research. There are no records of whether the third article used as previous research, 'Brave women sound the alarm - representations of men and women in the Swedish media coverage of #MeToo' is peer reviewed. However, it is part of a collection of articles and is written by two authors who reside at two of the larger universities in Sweden. The fact that it is part of a collection of articles suggests it must be of a certain standard to be allowed to be included. Furthermore, given that the authors reside at large Swedish universities, I deem this article a reliable source of information.

The material used for my theoretical framework consists of the article 'Ruined' Lives - Mediated white male victimhood' which has just been mentioned. It also consists of two books. The book 'Me, Not You' is written by Alison Phipps who is a sociologist and gender studies scholar. The book was published at Manchester University Press. Given Phipps' titles and that the book was published at a university I deem it a reliable source of information. The second book used for my theoretical framework is called 'Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny' and is written by Kate Manne. Manne is a philosopher who is active in the field of feminist philosophy among others. Her book is published at Oxford University Press. As the book is published at a university, and as Manne is experienced in the field of feminism I deem the book 'Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny' as a reliable source of information.

Furthermore, I have used two news articles. One of these is from SVT and the other from a Swedish newspaper called Expressen. I deem the article published by SVT as trustworthy due

to the information stated above. Expressen on the other hand, is an evening newspaper which provides both news but also what can be viewed more as gossip. Thus, I do not deem it a reliable source. However, the article provides valuable and insightful information and the context that it is used in makes the article appropriate.

1.2.2 Referencing

When someone from the documentary is being cited, the quote will be cited in accordance with the subtitles of the documentary. Sometimes the subtitles differ a little bit from what the person actually says. I choose to do this because it will provide more transparency as maybe sometimes it is hard to hear exactly what is being said. It will also contribute to the consistency of the quotes and the ability to reproduce the research.

1.3 Considerations about research ethics

The subject of this essay can be considered to be of a rather delicate nature. It touches on and analyses situations which involve accusations of sexual assault. Sexual assault is in and of itself a sensitive subject. Furthermore, it is an analysis of a documentary about an individual, portraying his perspective of the situation. It can potentially be sensitive or offensive to analyze something that is so personal for someone.

In order to avoid unethical formulations or phrases in my essay it must be made clear that it is an analysis of SVT and not of Ismail himself. The validity or credibility of either Ismail or the women who have accused him will not be discussed or questioned in any way, nor will the actual accusations.

As my primary material is public and available to anyone, I am not omitting the names of the people in the documentary.

I am aware that I have prejudices when it comes to this specific situation. This is because I am very invested in questions which touch on feminism and sexism, something I think has to do with the fact that I am a woman. Because of this I will be extra careful not to let these prejudices shine through in my analyses or anywhere in my essay, and I will do my best to keep an objective perspective.

Apart from the considerations taken above, the essay will also adhere to the general customs of maintaining a good ethical and academic integrity.

2. Overview of literature and previous research

I chose three articles that together will comprise the previous research which I have studied in preparation of this essay and which I feel will be highly relevant to my research question.

They will be presented in this section;

'Ruined' Lives - Mediated white male victimhood'

The article *'Ruined' Lives - Mediated white male victimhood'* written by Sarah Banet-Weiser explores how and why famous men who are accused of sexual assault are depicted as or portray themselves as victims. She does this through discussing a few cases from the United States where men have been accused and in some cases convicted of sexual assault or rape and how these men have been portrayed as victims. She arrives at the conclusion that there are a couple of narrative methods which aid the claim to victimhood. These include among some, depicting the man's life as ruined, using the authority available to men in today's society and depicting the women who have accused the men as suspicious and not credible.⁴ I have chosen this article because it aims to answer a question very similar to my own and it therefore feels highly relevant. This article also focuses on famous men, much like the documentary *Persona Non Grata* does. I have felt this article to be so relevant that I have decided to use it in order to construct my theoretical framework.

#MeToo; #HimToo: Popular Feminism and Hashtag Activism in the Kavanaugh Hearings

#MeToo is a movement which encourages women who have experienced sexual assault to share their stories on social media platforms. #HimToo was a sort of counter reaction to #MeToo. It developed as men who had been accused of sexual assault, but claimed to be innocent, publicly expressed how horrible these accusations were and how it affected their lives.

⁴ Banet-Weiser, Sarah. 'Ruined' lives : Mediated white male victimhood. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*. Vol. 24, no.1, 2021: 60-80. Doi: 10.1177/1367549420985940.

The article explores how #MeToo and #HimToo have been used on the social platform Twitter and their relation to popular feminism.⁵ #MeToo och #HimToo are ‘hashtags’ which are explained in the article as “keywords preceded by a “#” symbol that denote macrolevel conversations on Twitter.”⁶ The authors want to examine “these two hashtags in conjunction with each other to explore Banet-Weiser’s (2018) notion that popular feminism and popular misogyny are structurally linked.”⁷ They also aim to research how these ‘hashtags’ have been used by people on Twitter and why people choose to use them. The article concludes that both these ‘hashtags’ included four main themes which are, “personal experience, positive identification and disidentification, discursive appropriation, and calls to action.”⁸ It also concluded that the rise of feminism can be linked to the rise of misogyny.⁹ I have deemed this article relevant to my essay as it explores themes of women’s statement about having experienced sexual assault and the responses that the accused men are giving. It introduces the ‘hashtag’ #HimToo which I will go into more detail about in the section about my theoretical framework, making the article all the more relevant.

Brave women sound the alarm - representations of men and women in the Swedish media coverage of #MeToo

This article explores the Swedish media and its representation and portrayal of men who have been accused of sexual assault or harassment. It also explores the representation of the women who have accused these men. All this is explored in relation to the #MeToo movement. The article has chosen to focus on three specific cases of men who were accused of sexual assault and who received large media coverage. These men are “TV personality Martin Timell, journalist Fredrik Virtanen and culture personality Jean-Claude Arnault.”¹⁰ Furthermore, the aim of this study was to find out what different advantages and disadvantages were prominent in how #MeToo was projected in the media all in relation to

⁵ Dejmanee, Tisha, Zaher, Zulfia, Rouech, Samantha, Papa, J. Michael. #MeToo; #HimToo: Popular Feminism and Hashtag Activism in the Kavanaugh Hearings. *International Journal of Communication*. Vol. 14, 2020: 3946-3963. doi: 1932-8036/20200005.

⁶ Dejmanee, Tisha, Zaher, Zulfia, Rouech, Samantha, Papa, J. Michael. #MeToo; #HimToo: Popular Feminism and Hashtag Activism in the Kavanaugh Hearings. *International Journal of Communication*. Vol. 14, 2020: 3946-3963. doi: 1932-8036/20200005. p. 3951.

⁷ Ibid, p. 3956.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Lindqvist, Lisa, Ganetz, Hillevi. Brave women sound the alarm - representations of men and women in the Swedish media coverage of #MeToo. *Journalistica*. Vol.14, no.1, 2020: 14-46.

<https://tidsskrift-dk.ludwig.lub.lu.se/journalistica/article/view/123510>, p. 21

“power relations.”¹¹ Questions that were kept in mind during this research were for example, “How are the men and women referred to? How are their actions described and explained in regard to motivating factors?”¹² The essay explores themes of credibility in the media, how the women who accuse the men of sexual assault are portrayed, in terms of how reliable they are made out to be, and how much proof they have or how much their words can be trusted. It is argued in this essay that what reinforces the notion of how much we can trust these women is when the accused men come forward and say they did not intend for any of this to happen, or that they do not remember it in the same way. The essay concludes that women in the media, through depicting their stories with a “need to warn and help other women”¹³ create “a notion of female responsibility for putting an end to the problem of sexual assault.”¹⁴ What makes this essay relevant to my own essay is how it explores victimhood among the accused men. It suggests that the explanations the accused men give in the media allow for a sense of “installing doubt about its illegality.”¹⁵, i.e that the men instill a sense of doubt around whether their actions actually were illegal as claimed by the women. The authors further argue that these explanations “also seem to construct notions of male victimhood.”¹⁶ It is also suggested in the article that, “men can claim victimhood by expressing innocence.”¹⁷ Thus, this article explores different ways in which accused men claim victimhood, which is what I aim to do with my essay, making it highly relevant.

3. Theory and Method

3.1 Theory

I largely base my theoretical framework on the article *‘Ruined’ lives - Mediated white male victimhood*. This article is written by professor Sarah Banet-Wesier who currently works at the University of Southern California as well as the University of Pennsylvania. This article explores the ways through which men who are accused of sexual assault are presented or present themselves as victims.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 22.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Lindqvist, Lisa, Ganetz, Hillevi. Brave women sound the alarm - representations of men and women in the Swedish media coverage of #MeToo. *Journalistica*. Vol.14, no.1, 2020: 14-46.
<https://tidsskrift-dk.ludwig.lub.lu.se/journalistica/article/view/123510>, p. 39.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 30.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 29.

In addition to the article I use two books. The first one is called *'Me, Not You'*, written by Alison Phipps who is a gender studies scholar. The book focuses mainly on the themes of feminism and intersectionality. Phipps deals with the problem of a feminism which only focuses on or benefits white women, and excludes women who are not white. However, Phipps also touches on similar themes to Banet-Weiser such as how men who are accused of sexual violence or assault are presented as victims. This is the part of the book that I will concentrate on.

Finally I use the book *'Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny'*, written by philosopher Kate Manne. It also treats themes of feminism, sexual violence and most predominantly that of misogyny. Manne also explores how men accused of sexual violence are presented as victims.

In the book *Me, Not You*, gender studies scholar Phipps talks about how the #MeToo movement has experienced a backlash in the sense that it has not only encouraged women to speak out about their experiences of sexual assault but inadvertently also resulted in the accused men feeling threatened or scared and led them to publicly pledge innocence. Phipps claims that any kind of backlash was inevitable as #MeToo took off, and that “this took a number of forms: the hashtag #HimToo which identified accused men as victims and advised all men to be scared”.¹⁸ Some ways in which this takes form is described as “victim-blaming”¹⁹ and “chest-beating about ‘false allegations’”.²⁰

Banet-Weiser also writes about how #MeToo has opened up not only for women to share their experiences of sexual assault but also to this normalised attitude among men to defend themselves against these accusations and to ultimately do that using the narrative of a victim. She also suggests that the shift #MeToo caused has been felt not only by the women who now share their stories, but also by the accused men who now feel a more pressing need to defend themselves as the public now has learned what they are accused of. It can be argued that it was within this backlash from #MeToo that the role of claiming victimhood as a person accused of sexual assault was born.

¹⁸ Phipps, Alison. *ME NOT YOU The trouble with mainstream feminism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020, p. 66.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

With the help of Banet-Weiser, Manne and Phipps I have created a theoretical framework which is based on the four categories presented below.

Ruined life / Good life

One of Banet-Weiser's most prominent arguments about how men accused of sexual assault are depicted as victims is that their lives are portrayed as ruined and that they are portrayed as having lost something. According to Banet-Weiser one can portray the life of the accused as destroyed with the help of what she calls "hyperbolic claims of ruination".²¹ This is something she argues can be done either by the person themselves, by relatives or by the media.²²

When Banet-Weiser talks about 'good life' she suggests that the claims of ruination are more credible once it has been presented exactly what the accused has lost. Thus it can be argued that in order to maximize the effect of portraying the accused man's life as ruined it is effective to also depict exactly what he has lost.²³ Banet-Weiser argues that "The evidence one sees of a 'good life' of the men accused is framed as just the *trace* of a good life destroyed."²⁴

Another aspect of how a person's ruined life is presented is with what kinds of verbs are being used, passive or active ones. Banet-Weiser argues that victimhood is claimed through using passive verbs when explaining the accused person's alleged actions and "active language for statements about his victimization: 'I've lost ...'"²⁵

Sympathy

Sympathy is according to Manne something which is invoked when we are presented with someone losing something. She exemplifies this by using the case of Brock Turner who was convicted of raping a girl and later released early from prison on good behaviour. Turner caused many people to advocate for him and for his prospects of pursuing a swimming career

²¹ Banet-Weiser, Sarah. 'Ruined' lives : Mediated white male victimhood. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*. Vol. 24, no.1, 2021: 60-80. Doi: 10.1177/1367549420985940, p. 76.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Banet-Weiser, p. 66.

and excelling at college. Manne argues that by instilling a sense of sympathy for the accused, “insofar as he loses his appetite or swimming scholarship, then *he* will come to figure as the victim”.²⁶

Sympathy can therefore be said to be used as a way in which someone is portrayed as a victim. Through invoking sympathy for someone, that person will more easily be seen as a victim. Sympathy becomes a tool with which someone can be depicted as a victim.

Authority

Banet-Weiser suggest that men who are accused of sexual assault “draw on already existing forms of authority and claim themselves to be victims.”²⁷ It can be suggested that she means that these men are taking advantage of the patriarchal structures in our society and that they aid these men to claim victimhood. She argues that things such as “neoliberal culture”²⁸ and “networked misogyny”²⁹ are things which make it possible for these men to draw on the authoritative practices present. Neoliberal culture refers to in this case a relationship between the individual and the state in which the individual often is hurt by the state in some way. It refers to instances where “accusations against a ‘good person’ is easily explained away as frenzied ‘smears’ that ‘debase our public discourse’.”³⁰ Banet-Weiser argued that neoliberalism encourages a sense of entitlement to freedom based on a person’s privileges. In using the case of convicted American, Brock Turner, she means that “the severity of Turner’s ‘punishment’ is measured against his naturalized status and entitlements, rather than against the suffering of the woman he harmed”³¹ The networked misogyny refers to something which functions within the patriarchy “to enforce and police women’s subordination and to uphold male dominance”³².

Perpetrator and victim switch roles

“Now consider: who is the “but-for” cause of the rapist ending up in this situation? None other than the person who testified against him: his victim may hence be recast as the

²⁶ Manne, Kate. *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 20.

²⁷ Banet-Weiser, p. 75.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 75.

²⁹ *Ibid*.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 73.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 67.

³² Manne, p. 19.

villain.”³³ Manne claims that “a victim narrative needs a villain, or victimizer”.³⁴ This means that if the perpetrator is depicted as a victim it is almost inevitable that the role of perpetrator now goes to the alleged victim. Manne presents a theory where one through depicting oneself as the victim when one is the perpetrator automatically transfers the role of villain to the initial victim. It can therefore be suggested that the men accused of sexual assault can claim victimhood through depicting the one who accused them as the perpetrator.

3.2 Method

I have chosen to conduct a narrative analysis as well as a content analysis, both according to instructions from the book written by Bergström & Boréus on research methods.

I chose a narrative analysis because I will examine a documentary which means that my material consists of spoken words and a large part of the documentary is conducted like interviews. The narrative analysis is described as analyzing “concrete narratives, for example the ones found in interview transcriptions or texts in the media.”³⁵ as well as providing “useful insights into society and politics.”³⁶ I will perform two different narrative analyses as the documentary aired in two parts.

I am aware of the weaknesses of a narrative analysis. One obvious weakness is that it is impossible to know whether I interpret the narrative in the documentary “in the same way that the viewer on the couch at home does.”³⁷ However, it can be argued that “no reading is free from interpretation”.³⁸ Due to the difference in interpretation, the narrative analysis can be criticized because it cannot “be reproduced by other researchers.”³⁹ which can question the credibility or validity of the research. I have, in spite of this criticism, chosen to use this method of analysis. I believe a narrative analysis will provide me with useful information as it is a tool with which I can explore the narrative of the documentary. It will provide me with many useful insights as an analysis of the narrative is what will help me answer the research question of this essay. I will, in order to reduce my own bias shining through in my analysis,

³³ Manne, p. 201.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Original quote: “konkreta narrativer, exempelvis de man kan hitta i intervjuutskrifter eller medietexter.” Bergström, Göran och Boréus, Kristina (red.). *Textens Mening och Makt Metodbok i Samhällsvetenskaplig Text - och Diskursanalys*, Studentlitteratur AB, Lund, Författarna och Studentlitteratur 2000, 2012, p. 260.

³⁶ Original quote: “användbara insikter om samhälle och politik.”, Ibid.

³⁷ Original quote: “på samma sätt som tittaren hemma i soffan.”, Ibid, p. 252.

³⁸ Original quote: “ingen läsning är fri från tolkning.”, Ibid, p. 255.

³⁹ Original quote: “reproduceras av andra forskare.”, Ibid, p. 254.

be as transparent as I can and include my narrative analysis, in the section ‘Narrative analysis’, in my essay so the reader can easily follow my thoughts and reasoning.

I have also chosen to conduct a content analysis which will act as a complement to the previously stated method. A content analysis provides an overview of the frequency of certain words and phrases that appear in the material. I believe this will aid me in making conclusions about what kind of language is used and give an insight into how SVT portrays a man accused of sexual assault in the documentary *Persona Non Grata*.

The content analysis can be criticized for not being thorough enough. Bergström & Boréus claim that quantifying words or phrases, i.e counting how many times a word appears, is built on the idea that “a higher frequency (or more or bigger) means that this something is more important or dominant in a certain context.”⁴⁰, which is not always the case. I am aware of this criticism but the content analysis will be useful to my research as I will use it to complement the narrative analysis in order to provide a general overview of the material. It will help me gain quick access to seeing what words and phrases are most frequently used. I will be careful not to blindly interpret a higher frequency of words as indicating a higher importance.

My narrative analysis will follow a table presented by Bergström & Boréus. It contains:

- “Abstract= conclusion of the narratives
- Orientation= time, situation, participants
- Complicating storyline= the move from equilibrium to imbalance
- Resolution= what finally happened
- Coda= bring the perspective back to the present”⁴¹

⁴⁰ Original quote: “högre frekvens (eller mer eller större) betyder att detta något är viktigare eller mer dominerande i ett visst sammanhang.”, Ibid, p. 80.

⁴¹ Original quote:

“Abstract= sammanfattning av narrativen
Orientering= tid, situation, deltagare
Komplicerande handling= förflyttning från jämvikt till obalans
Upplösning= vad som slutligen hände
Coda= återför perspektivet till nutid ”, Bergström, Boréus , p. 232.

I will fill this table with the narrative from the documentary *Persona Non Grata*. As the documentary consists mostly of spoken words it can be a long process to get an overview of what is said.

Bergström & Boréus ask who “has the position to evaluate, to tell us how we are supposed to understand the story”.⁴² The person in this position, to help us understand the story, is often a reporter or a journalist. I am very interested in this idea as I want to examine how Ismail is portrayed, which in turn depends on who is in the position to evaluate and help us understand the documentary. Therefore I will explore whether there is someone who fits this description, who helps the viewer understand the narrative of the documentary.

In my content analysis I will construct a table for coding the language in the documentary. This table consists of monitoring the frequency of certain phrases or words in the documentary. I will use my theoretical framework as an approach with which to construct this table. In order to exemplify, my theoretical framework presents ways in which men accused of sexual assault are depicted as victims. Thus, I will utilize these when I construct the table with which I will analyze and code the documentary. I will provide my table in which I have coded the documentary in the appendix so that the reader will be able to follow my line of reasoning and the analysis as a whole. I am also including the categories which constitute the table of my content analysis here, in order to help the reader to more easily follow my analysis later in the essay.

Content analysis categories:

- Ruined life
- Good life
- #MeToo
- Shame / Responsibility (expressed by Ismail)

I deem both these methods of narrative and content analysis useful as I believe they will provide me with the best conditions with which to answer my research question in a nuanced and well equipped manner.

⁴² Original quote: “har positionen att utvärdera, att tala om för oss hur vi ska förstå historien”, Ibid, p. 247.

4 Narrative analysis

In this section I will present my narrative analysis of the documentary. As previously stated I am doing this to increase transparency and to help the reader follow my line of thought and to more easily partake in the next section where I make the actual analysis where material and theoretical framework is connected. As presented in the section on theory I will present two analyses, one for each part of the documentary. The narrative analysis will be presented in accordance with the table provided by Bergström & Boréus in their book on research methods.

Narrative analysis of part 1 of *Persona Non Grata*

Abstract:

Ismail is the first person to speak in the documentary:

I am sitting here because I am the comedian who was accused during metoo. I am doing it because I have lost my sense of direction. Because I was asked to, I don't know what is up and down, what is right or wrong anymore. But on the other hand it is a very interesting discussion - questions which are highly relevant. I just wish I wasn't in this position. But now I am.⁴³

He is seen puzzling in his apartment and talking about how he didn't have suicidal thoughts but at the same time didn't know to keep living. After that there are strips of text that informs the viewer of what has happened in terms of what he has been accused of and how these allegations have been furthered legally.

Orientation:

Where: The documentary takes place in Ismail's apartment primarily. Some individual interviews take place in a room which resembles a bar. Some scenes are also filmed in larger premises which look like concert venues.

⁴³ Original quote: "Jag sitter här för att jag är komikern som anklagades under metoo. Jag gör det för att jag har tappat kompassen. För att jag fick frågan. Jag vet inte längre vad som är upp och ner och rätt och fel. Men å andra sidan är det en väldigt intressant diskussion- och frågor som är högst relevanta. Jag önskar bara att jag inte satt här. Men nu är det så.", Dahlström, Sofia. *Persona Non Grata - Soran Ismail: 1.Fallet* [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021. <https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (00:07-00:44).

When: The documentary takes place three years after Ismail was publicly accused. The accusations took place in 2017 and the documentary aired in 2021, having been filmed and made in 2020.

Situation: The situation is that Ismail lives as someone who is accused but not convicted and how this has ruined his life and career.

Participants: Soran Ismail, his partner Jennifer Terry, friends Måns Möller, Özz Nûjen, authors Kajsa Ekman and Jens Liljestränd.

Complicating storyline:

What is consistent throughout the documentary is the portrayal of what Ismail has lost and how he has suffered ever since he was accused of sexual assault and rape. The complicating storyline should describe “the move from equilibrium to imbalance”.⁴⁴ This section of the narrative analysis will provide that.

It starts with a recap of Ismail’s career, different awards he won and his overall achievements. One of these awards was motivated with the following reasoning; “*With humour, gravity and unconventional methods, he performs important and courageous contributions for diversity and tolerance. UN-covenant’s award for human rights*”.⁴⁵ Ismail himself looks back on this time and reflects upon it, saying “People started to come to watch ME doing standup.”⁴⁶ This lets the viewer see his previously blossoming career and bright prospects.

Ismail describes that before entering the comedy branch and excelling there, he was a virgin until he landed a job at the tv show ‘Parlamentet’ and that after that his life consisted of a great career and lots of women wanting to sleep with him. He tells stories from his childhood

⁴⁴ Original quote: “förflyttning från jämvikt till obalans”, Bergström & Boréus, p. 232.

⁴⁵ Original quote: ”*Med humor, allvar och okonventionella metoder gör han viktiga och modiga insatser för mångfald och tolerans. FN-förbundets pris för mänskliga rättigheter*”, Dahlström, Sofia. Persona Non Grata - Soran Ismail: 1.Fallet, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021.
<https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (04:31-04:38).

⁴⁶ Original quote: “Det började komma folk för att titta på MIG när jag gjorde standup.”, Dahlström, Sofia. Persona Non Grata - Soran Ismail: 1.Fallet, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021.
<https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (03:17-03:19).

where he would never get the girls' attention and that he now finally has been let into the group he had longed for so long.

After this there are several video clips of news reporters talking about #MeToo and what that is and how it spread across the world in 2017. It feels like a change in narrative from positively reminiscing about Ismail's career to diving into #MeToo and how that spread across the world. This is followed by video clips of news reporters specifically talking about Ismail and #MeToo and what he has been accused of. Pictures of newspapers appear, where things such as "By using his hands he touches the woman in a way which can be likened to rape."⁴⁷ is written. Now the documentary experiences a proper shift in narrative where it starts to portray how Ismail is suffering.

After several portrayals of what Ismail has been accused of and what has happened, Ismail and his girlfriend are interviewed about the repercussions on their life. His partner talks about how journalists camped out in front of their apartment and how they were approached by journalists on the street for comments. Ismail also reflects on this time saying "At first I could not walk or stand. I had a hard time breathing and eating."⁴⁸ Pictures of Ismail with an uncut beard and long hair appear on the screen. His girlfriend says, "He didn't get dressed. He sat in his underwear for months."⁴⁹ Ismail talks about how he during this time didn't have the courage to go outside and face people. His partner says, "We had our car tires slashed three times."⁵⁰ Ismail tells us that "Since it happened I haven't worked. It's been...three years during which I have not done stand up or in any way expressed myself creatively."⁵¹

⁴⁷ Original quote: "Genom att använda händerna berör han kvinnan på ett sätt som är att likställa med våldtäkt.", Dahlström, Sofia. Persona Non Grata - Soran Ismail: 1.Fallet, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021. <https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (08:25-08:30).

⁴⁸ Original quote: "Först kunde jag inte gå och stå. Jag hade svårt att andas och att äta.", Dahlström, Sofia. Persona Non Grata - Soran Ismail: 1.Fallet, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021. <https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (11:05-11:12).

⁴⁹ Original quote: "Han klädde inte på sig. Han satt i kalsonger i flera månader.", Dahlström, Sofia. Persona Non Grata - Soran Ismail: 1.Fallet, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021. <https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (11:41-11:45).

⁵⁰ Original quote: "Vi fick våra bildäck sönderskurna tre gånger.", Dahlström, Sofia. Persona Non Grata - Soran Ismail: 1.Fallet, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021. <https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (13:07-13:11).

⁵¹ Original quote: "Sen det hände har jag inte jobbat. Det är väl...tre år nu som jag varken kört standup eller på nåt annat sätt uttryckt mig kreativt.", Dahlström, Sofia. Persona Non Grata - Soran Ismail: 1.Fallet, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021. <https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (18:15-18:25).

Author Jens Liljestrände talks about how “A person like Soran Ismail works with himself as a brand. In this situation the brand hasn’t been doing well - due to the allegations of him being a rapist.”⁵² He says that “sexual crimes are stigmatising, for the victim but also for the perpetrator.”⁵³

Author Kajsa Ekman on the other hand talks more about it in favour of the women. She argues that “we don’t view sexual crimes as crimes in Sweden,”⁵⁴ and that “in many cases Sweden doesn’t take sexual crimes seriously.”⁵⁵ “It is obvious that in police investigations they sometimes omit to listen to the witness”⁵⁶

Ismail meets up with with two of his friends and they speak about his upcoming comedy show, which is supposed to be the first since he was accused of sexual assault and stopped working, three years ago. Together they discuss how he should construct this show. His friend suggests that Ismail during his show should talk about “how everything just falls apart. Finally you sit without a job and no one picks up the phone when you call.”⁵⁷

Ismail tells his friends what has happened, “I was accused of...everything from having behaved poorly to being a criminal.”⁵⁸

They discuss what has actually happened, what he was accused of and how it affected Ismail. They also express that it can be disadvantageous to be friends with Ismail, as “there is no

⁵² Original quote: “En person som Soran Ismail jobbar med sig själv som ett varumärke. Här har varumärket inte mått bra - av anklagelserna om att han är en våldtäktsman.”, Dahlström, Sofia. Persona Non Grata - Soran Ismail: 1.Fallet, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021. <https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (14:53-15:05).

⁵³ Original quote: “sexualbrott är stigmatiserande, för offret men också för förövaren.”, Dahlström, Sofia. Persona Non Grata - Soran Ismail: 1.Fallet, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021. <https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (17:54-17:57).

⁵⁴ Original quote: “vi inte ser sexualbrott som brott i Sverige.”, Dahlström, Sofia. Persona Non Grata - Soran Ismail: 1.Fallet, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021. <https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (16:54-16:56).

⁵⁵ Original quote: “i många fall tar Sverige inte sexualbrott på allvar.”, Dahlström, Sofia. Persona Non Grata - Soran Ismail: 1.Fallet, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021. <https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (17:17-17:19).

⁵⁶ Original quote: “Det syns i polisutredningar att man ibland underlåter att höra vittnen”, Dahlström, Sofia. Persona Non Grata - Soran Ismail: 1.Fallet, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021. <https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (17:25-17:30).

⁵⁷ Original quote: “hur allt bara rasar. Till slut sitter du utan jobb och ingen svarar när du ringer.”, Dahlström, Sofia. Persona Non Grata - Soran Ismail: 1.Fallet, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021. <https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (20:51-20:57).

⁵⁸ Original quote: “Jag blev anklagad för...allt från att ha betett mig illa till att ha varit brottslig.”, Dahlström, Sofia. Persona Non Grata - Soran Ismail: 1.Fallet, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021. <https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (20:18-20:25).

commercial value in being friends with Soran.”⁵⁹. His friends also express their concern for Ismail and his mental health:

I remember your apartment. It didn't look great. It was like a war zone. Total misery. It smells stuffy...I was so scared you would commit suicide. And I felt that I didn't want to be one of those who turned their back on you while this was happening.⁶⁰

This concern for Ismail's mental health is also expressed by his partner Terry, “I was terrified. I was so scared he would kill himself.”⁶¹ She recounts a story where Ismail called her and told her he couldn't take it anymore, which was a very worrisome experience for her where she thought he might have committed suicide.

Resolution:

The end of the first part of the documentary is an insight into Ismail's apartment where he and his girlfriend eat dinner together and discuss how Ismail's day went when he met up with his friends to discuss and plan his upcoming show.

Coda:

In the final scenes of the first part of the documentary there are strips of text that inform the viewer that SVT has attempted to reach the women who accused Ismail but with either no response or the response that they do not want to participate.

Narrative analysis of part 2 of *Persona Non Grata*

Abstract:

The first scene of the second part of the documentary depicts Ismail in an individual interview where he talks about the importance of sexual confirmation in his life. “I want to

⁵⁹ Original quote: “det saknas kommersiellt värde i att vara kompis med Soran.”, Dahlström, Sofia. *Persona Non Grata - Soran Ismail: 1.Fallet*, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021. <https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (26:13-26:18).

⁶⁰ Original quote: “Jag kommer ihåg din lägenhet. Det såg ju inte kul ut där alltså. Det var som en krigsskådeplats. Total misär. Det luktar instängt... Jag var livrädd att du skulle begå självmord. Och jag kände att jag inte ville vara en av dem som vände dig ryggen när det var sådär.”, Dahlström, Sofia. *Persona Non Grata - Soran Ismail: 1.Fallet*, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021. <https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (22:25-22:48).

⁶¹ Original quote: “Jag var livrädd. Jag var jätterädd för att han skulle ta livet av sig.”, Dahlström, Sofia. *Persona Non Grata - Soran Ismail: 1. Fallet*, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021. <https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (23:14-23:18).

sleep with lots of people. I don't think that will ever change. I understand that is not what you're supposed to say...but it is how it is for me.”⁶²

Yet again strips of text appear letting the viewer know what has happened, “Során Ismail was reported to the police in the fall of 2017 for multiple rapes and sexual harassments.”⁶³ They inform the viewer that Ismail has been accused of sexual assault, that he is accused and not convicted and that this documentary will portray his perspective.

Orientation

Where: This part of the documentary takes place in the same spaces as the first part.

When: This part of the documentary takes place in the same time span as the first part as it is a direct continuation of part one.

Situation: The situation is also almost identical to the first part of the documentary. However, there is more focus in this part on Ismail's relationships and how they were affected by the accusations. There is also a bigger focus on how he will rebuild his career.

Participants: Ismail, partner Jennifer Terry, friend Kristoffer Appelquist, tv producer Johan, authors Kajsa Ekman and Jens Liljestränd.

Complicating storyline:

SVT informs the viewer that, “Során Ismail was reported to the police in the fall of 2017 for multiple rapes and sexual harassments.”⁶⁴

Ismail's partner Jennifer Terry shares her perspective of how her life changed after he was accused of sexual assault. She reveals how hard she took it and that she dealt with it through

⁶² Original quote: “Jag vill ligga med jättemånga. Jag tror aldrig det kommer ändras. Jag förstår att det inte är det man ska säga...men så är det för mig.”, Dahlström, Sofia. Persona Non Grata - Során Ismail: 2. Ingen rök utan eld, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021. <https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (00:18- 00:36).

⁶³ Original quote: “Során Ismail polisanmälades hösten 2017 för flera våldtäkter och sexuella ofredanden.”, Dahlström, Sofia. Persona Non Grata - Során Ismail: 2. Ingen rök utan eld, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021. <https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (00:39-00:44).

⁶⁴ Original quote: “Során Ismail polisanmälades hösten 2017 för flera våldtäkter och sexuella ofredanden.”, Dahlström, Sofia. Persona Non Grata - Során Ismail: 1. Ingen rök utan eld, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021. <https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (00:39-00:44).

riding the bus, from bus stop to bus stop, and listening to music. She remembers how she “was in some kind of limbo - crisis, shock, grief.”⁶⁵

Ismail tells us that he used the social media app Snapchat to send pictures of himself naked, as he remembers, the pictures disappeared after they had been viewed. He then describes how someone accused him of sending an unwanted picture to them.

Terry continues to describe how she and their relationship was affected by the accusations against Ismail. She recalls thinking “You are the one who put us in this situation and I am the one who is carrying us through it.”⁶⁶ . There is footage shown from their apartment and the viewer can hear a baby making noises in the background.

Ismail says:

It would maybe have been better for me mentally, emotionally - and socially if there had been a trial. Then you could see what is true and what is possible to support and how. Now it's some kind of ...I don't know. Nothing happens. It is unresolved “deluxe”.⁶⁷

Author Ekman is of the opinion that:

The judicial system has not done its job. The reports of rape that actually lead to prosecution...The ones that lead to conviction are even fewer. An extreme minority actually go somewhere. Is that not a problem, that it is so incredibly hard - to convict someone of rape? Soran Ismail has not fallen, or been held accountable for his actions. He has not been punished.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Original quote: “var i nån typ av fritt fall - kris, chock, sorg.”, Dahlström, Sofia. Persona Non Grata - Soran Ismail: 2. Ingen rök utan eld, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021. <https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (01:27-01:32).

⁶⁶ Original quote: “Det är du som har satt oss i den här situationen och jag som bär oss igenom den.”, Dahlström, Sofia. Persona Non Grata - Soran Ismail: 2. Ingen rök utan eld, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021. <https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (05:48-05:56).

⁶⁷ Original quote: “Det hade nog kanske varit bättre för mig psykiskt, emotionellt - och socialt om det hade blivit rättegång. Då hade man fått se vad som stämmer och vad som går att styrka hur. Nu blir det nåt slags... Jag vet inte. Det blir ingenting av det hela. Det är ouppklarat “deluxe”.”, Dahlström, Sofia. Persona Non Grata - Soran Ismail: 2. Ingen rök utan eld, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021. <https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (06:05-06:36).

⁶⁸ Original quote: “Rättsväsendet har inte gjort jobbet. De anmälningar för våldtäkt som leder till åtal...De som leder till dom är ännu färre. En extrem minoritet leder nånvar. Är inte det ett problem att det är så otroligt svårt - att fälla nån för våldtäkt? Soran Ismail har inte fallit, eller hållits ansvarig för sina handlingar. Han har inte blivit bestraffad.”, Dahlström, Sofia. Persona Non Grata - Soran Ismail: 2. Ingen rök utan eld, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021. <https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (07:18-07:49).

We learn that Ismail reported a woman for defamation who in turn had reported him for sexual assault in a private group on Facebook. “In the spring of 2019, Soran Ismail reports a woman to the police, who had written in a Facebook group that he had sexually harassed her.”⁶⁹. She is convicted of defamation, but he sentence “is to be tried in the court of appeal.”⁷⁰

Ismail also recounts that life for him was hard after he was accused, “Everything is a reminder of what happened.”⁷¹. He remembers seeing his old colleagues on tv and wondering, “What if I see them again! What will they think, what will they say?”⁷²

Ismail meets with one of his friends who is also a former colleague, Kristoffer Appelquist. Appelquist asks Ismail how he is doing now. He also says that he does not know exactly what Ismail has been accused of, but all he knows is, “that you are on the metoo-spectrum.”⁷³

Appelquist recounts how he and Ismail were playing badminton sometime prior to this documentary:

We were playing badminton, and you posted a picture on Instagram. And people were upset that I was playing badminton with someone I had known since he was 18. If you do something reprehensible then you can't play badminton with people. There's something strange about that. Especially if you think about that I had performed at Kumla [a prison]. To

⁶⁹ Original quote: “Våren 2019 polisanmäler Soran Ismail en kvinna som i en Facebook-grupp skrivit att han utsatt henne för sexuella övergrepp.”, Dahlström, Sofia. Persona Non Grata - Soran Ismail: 2. Ingen rök utan eld, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021. <https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (07:58-08:03).

⁷⁰ Original quote: “ska prövas i hovrätten.”, Dahlström, Sofia. Persona Non Grata - Soran Ismail: 2. Ingen rök utan eld, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021. <https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (08:00-08:03).

⁷¹ Original quote: “Allt möjligt påminner om det som hände.”, Dahlström, Sofia. Persona Non Grata - Soran Ismail: 2. Ingen rök utan eld, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021. <https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (8:48-8:50).

⁷² Original quote: “Tänk om jag träffar dem igen! Vad tänker de, vad säger de?”, Dahlström, Sofia. Persona Non Grata - Soran Ismail: 2. Ingen rök utan eld, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021. <https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (9:01-9:05).

⁷³ Original quote: “att du är på metoo-skalan.”, Dahlström, Sofia. Persona Non Grata - Soran Ismail: 2. Ingen rök utan eld, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021. <https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (10:43-10:48).

perform in front of people who are convicted of murder and smuggling narcotics is therefore less reprehensible than playing badminton with Soran Ismail. That bothers me.⁷⁴

Ismail and Appelquist talk about how Ismail has had a hard time with his mental health. They also discuss what actually happened, questioning whether Ismail has done what he has been accused of or not.

They also discuss how Ismail has trouble with determining what actually happened,

I don't think this is crystal clear. That someone: "Hey, you did this." - "Shit, I never thought about it." It would be easier if it was like that. "You drove too fast. We can see that." You confess if there is evidence. Or if you did it.⁷⁵

During the course of this part of the documentary there is footage shown of Ismail walking around in town and people keeping their distance from him. For example he is shown wandering about in a grocery store and people around him actively avoiding coming too close to him. There is also footage of him walking around on the street and there are people around him, looking at him with an accusatory look.

At the end of the documentary Ismail says that, "Jennifer thinks it's sad that I have changed. My friends say that I am not myself."⁷⁶

Resolution:

We see that three months later, Ismail performs for the first time since he was accused and essentially stopped working. In this performance he shares his perspective of what happened.

⁷⁴ Original quote: "Vi spelade badminton, och du la upp en bild på Instagram. Och folk var upprörda över att jag spelade badminton med nån som jag känt sen han var 18. Om du gör nånting som är klandervärdt då får du inte spela badminton med folk. Det är nåt konstigt med det. Framförallt om man tänker på att jag hade uppträtt i Kumla. Att uppträda för folk som är dömda för mord och narkotikasmuggling är alltså mindre klandervärdt än att spela badminton med Soran Ismail. Det stör mig.", Dahlström, Sofia. Persona Non Grata - Soran Ismail: 2. Ingen rök utan eld, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021. <https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (13:44-14:29).

⁷⁵ Original quote: "Jag tycker inte att det är glasklart. Att nån: "Hallå, det här gjorde du." - "Shit, det har jag inte tänkt på." Det skulle vara lättare om det var så. "Du körde för fort. Det ser vi." Man erkänner om det finns bevis. Eller om man har gjort det.", Dahlström, Sofia. Persona Non Grata - Soran Ismail: 2. Ingen rök utan eld, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021. <https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (14:53-15:13).

⁷⁶ Original quote: "Jennifer tycker att det är sorgligt att jag har förändrats. Mina kompisar säger att jag inte är mig själv.", Dahlström, Sofia. Persona Non Grata - Soran Ismail: 2. Ingen rök utan eld, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021. <https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (23:47-23:54).

Most of you know I was one of the people who were accused during metoo - but not much more. The only thing that I have said is that I haven't done anything criminal. But that doesn't mean that everything I have done has been right.⁷⁷

He then goes on to tell them about his extravagant sex life and insinuates that this a reason why people would like him less.

Coda:

Ismail is back on stage, a small one with a small audience. This, he says, is like it used to be when he first started off as a comedian. This is a natural ending to the documentary, as we see Ismail back on stage again, something which he has been seen working towards throughout the documentary. Yet again, there are strips of text appearing on the screen again informing the viewer that SVT has tried to reach out to the women who accused Ismail and asked if they wanted to participate, and that one of the women declined and two of them didn't answer.

5 Analysis and discussion

5.1 Analysis

This section will explore how the material connects to the theoretical framework and will essentially attempt to answer the research question. The arguments in this section will be based on the narrative analysis included above as well as the content analysis which will be available in the section 'Appendices'. I have chosen to not reproduce the quotes once again in this section as it can be seen as repetitive, but rather to just refer to the instances where they are quoted in the section 'Research'. All the parts of the theoretical framework will be explored in this section, not in any particular order but rather in a way which promotes coherence and a sense of flow to the essay.

Ismail is the first person we see and hear in the introduction of the documentary. According to Bergström & Boréus there is often someone responsible for telling the audience how they

⁷⁷ Original quote: "De flesta vet att jag var en av dem som blev anklagad under metoo - men inte så mycket mer. Det enda jag har sagt är att jag inte har gjort nånting brottsligt. Men det betyder inte att allt jag har gjort har varit rätt.", Dahlström, Sofia. Persona Non Grata - Soran Ismail: 2. Ingen rök utan eld, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021. <https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (21:20-21:36).

are supposed to understand the story when it comes to, for example, news reports. Often this person is a reporter or journalist, but in this case it is Ismail. However, he does not remain in this position throughout the documentary. Nevertheless, he sets the tone for the documentary and through that lets us know how we are supposed to feel according to Bergström & Boréus.⁷⁸

This is something which can be connected to Manne's ideas on sympathy which has been presented in the theoretical framework. The documentary starts with a statement by Ismail which inevitably sets the tone for the whole documentary. What Manne suggests is that if we as viewers receive an initial feeling of sympathy for the accused, we are far more likely to view him/her as a victim. Thus, through choosing to start the documentary with Ismail, and having the first words be ones that explain that he has been accused, and that he has lost his moral compass and that he wishes that he wasn't in this position it can be argued that an initial feeling of sympathy is instilled with the viewer. Presenting Ismail as losing things such as his career, the stability of his relationship, and his creative spark are all things which could be argued to contribute to evoking sympathy with the viewer, ultimately portraying him as a victim.

Part one of the documentary brings the viewer on a journey through Ismail's career. It tells the viewer how it started and flourished, all his accomplishments and achievements. When the viewer is presented with the first glimpse of how Ismail is accused of sexual assault, and how his career starts to deteriorate, it can be argued to be a typical example of what Banet-Weiser means when she talks about a 'ruined life' and the traces of a 'good life'. We are presented with Ismail's 'good life' when we get to follow his career and see all his achievements, and we are then presented with his 'ruined life' when we see how his career is destroyed once he is accused of sexual assault. It can therefore be argued that due to this progression in the documentary, Ismail is portrayed as a victim.

Evidence of his 'ruined life' is seen in many aspects of the documentary. When Ismail and his partner Terry talk about how their lives changed after the accusations, we are presented with descriptions of how they were crowded with journalists camping out in front of their house and following them on the street asking for comments. This becomes a clear depiction of how

⁷⁸ Bergström & Boréus, p. 247.

their privacy was ruined. Terry also mentions that the tires on their car were slashed several times, which is a portrayal of how their personal property was ruined. As we see pictures of Ismail with an uncut beard and very long hair it is suggested that his personal hygiene and care is also something which was ruined. There are also several mentions through the documentary, in both the first and the second part, of Ismail's career having been destroyed. He, for example, recalls how ever since the accusations he hasn't done any stand up or any other creative work. His social life is portrayed as ruined when he talks with his friend Måns, who remembers how Ismail's apartment during the time of the accusations looked horrible and that nobody would pick up the phone when Ismail called. The ruination of Ismail's social life is also portrayed when his friend expresses that "there is no commercial value in being friends with Soran."⁷⁹

In the second part of the documentary there are more indications of how Ismail's and Terry's relationship was ruined. We see this through Terry recounting how she would ride the bus and listen to music all day, just to get away from Ismail. She also recalls feeling in shock and very torn about all of this. Ismail's status is also portrayed as ruined when he is seen walking around in a grocery store and people around him are seen intentionally avoiding him, as well as people on the street giving him accusatory looks.

It can be argued that these examples of how Ismail's life has been ruined all contribute to making Ismail figure as a victim if one adheres to Banet-Weiser's theory about how a 'ruined life' helps claim victimhood.

It is presented in the theoretical framework that the use of active and passive verbs can emphasize the claim to victimhood. When we see that Ismail's accusations are presented using passive verbs it can be argued that it is a claim to victimhood. This can be further suggested when active verbs are used to describe how he himself has been affected by these accusations, i.e what *he* has lost. The passive verbs portray what Banet-Weiser argues is a claim to victimhood. The focus is not only on what the accused has lost but the language and rhetoric used actually seem to mimic this shift in focus. In the second part of the documentary, SVT lets strips of text appear to inform the viewer about what has happened. In

⁷⁹ Original quote: "det saknas kommersiellt värde i att vara kompis med Soran.", Dahlström, Sofia. Persona Non Grata - Soran Ismail: 1. Fallet, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021. <https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (26:13-26:18).

describing what Ismail has been accused of they are using a passive verb. This is seen as they claim that “Során Ismail was reported [passive verb] to the police in the fall of 2017 for multiple rapes and sexual harassments.”⁸⁰ It is a passive verb as the sentence describes that something happened *to* Ismail, the subject of the sentence. Who reported him is also omitted from the sentence, another typical indication of a passive verb.⁸¹ An example of when active language is being used is when SVT informs the viewer that Ismail has accused a woman of defamation. “In the spring of 2019, Során Ismail reports [active verb] a woman to the police, who had written in a Facebook group that he had sexually harassed her.”⁸² Here Ismail is an active subject who ‘reports’ [active verb] the woman [object]. This fits the description of an active verb.⁸³ Ismail accusing a woman of defamation is used as an example of where he figures as the victim as he is by default, by accusing her of defamation, giving her the role of perpetrator and himself the role of victim. It can be suggested that passive verbs are used when describing Ismail’s allegedly criminal actions and that active verbs are used when describing how he himself has suffered. This can, in accordance with Banet-Weiser, indicate that Ismail is portrayed as a victim.

Another theory presented suggesting how an accused person can be portrayed as a victim is through swapping who is seen as the perpetrator and who is seen as the victim, giving the alleged victim the role of the perpetrator and vice versa. It can be argued that through portraying how Ismail’s life has been ruined, as a result of the accusations against him made by different women, these women in a way become the perpetrators. They can be seen as the reason behind why Ismail’s life has been ruined. Something else which can be argued to support the idea that victim and perpetrator changing roles helps in claiming victimhood is that Ismail accused a woman of defamation. She had accused him of sexual assault in a private group on Facebook. This woman was literally accused of being the perpetrator, automatically giving Ismail the role of the victim. By including this information in the

⁸⁰ Original quote: “Során Ismail polisanmälades hösten 2017 för flera våldtäkter och sexuella ofredanden.”, Dahlström, Sofia. *Persona Non Grata - Során Ismail: 1. Ingen rök utan eld*, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021. <https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (00:39-00:44).

⁸¹ American University. 2009. Active & Passive Verbs. *Academic Support Center, Writing Lab*. 2009. <https://www.american.edu/provost/academic-access/upload/active-and-passive-verbs.pdf> (Accessed 2022-01-08).

⁸² Original quote: “Våren 2019 polisanmäler Során Ismail en kvinna som i en Facebook-grupp skrivit att han utsatt henne för sexuella övergrepp.”, Dahlström, Sofia. *Persona Non Grata - Során Ismail: 1. Ingen rök utan eld*, [Television]. Sveriges Television. 2021. <https://www.svtplay.se/persona-non-grata-soran-ismail>, (07:58-08:03).

⁸³ American University. 2009. Active & Passive Verbs. *Academic Support Center, Writing Lab*. 2009. <https://www.american.edu/provost/academic-access/upload/active-and-passive-verbs.pdf> (Accessed 2022-01-08).

documentary, it can be suggested that it is a way through which Ismail is presented as a victim, by literally giving the role of perpetrator to the woman who has allegedly experienced sexual assault.

The phrase #MeToo is mentioned several times during the documentary. In the section on theory it is presented that #MeToo as a movement inevitably produces a counter reaction where the accused or convicted man is portrayed as the victim. The woman who accused Ismail in a private Facebook group was later accused of defamation by Ismail. It can be argued that as this woman is recast as a perpetrator and Ismail is recast as a victim, SVT can be said to have used what is referred to as “victim-blaming”⁸⁴ and “chest-beating about ‘false allegations’”⁸⁵. It can be argued that the woman, the alleged victim, is being blamed for her actions of speaking out, and as she is accused of defamation it can be suggested that she is accused of false accusations. Thus, this can be argued to be an example of the counter reaction against #MeToo.

Ismail mentions several times during the documentary that he doesn't know what is true and what actually happened. He mentions that he wishes there had been a trial so they could find out whether he's guilty or not. It is pointed out several times throughout the documentary that Ismail is not convicted, and that a woman who accused him was herself convicted of defamation. This can be argued to be a further suggestion of false accusations, another example of the counter reaction of #MeToo.

Authors Jens Liljestrand and Kajsa Ekman both comment on how Ismail's alleged actions affect both him and the women who have accused him. Liljestrand speaks a lot about Ismail and how he has been affected. For example, Liljestrand mentions that the accusations of sexual assault were a disturbance to the brand that is Ismail's name is. Liljestrand also mentioned how sexual accusations are stigmatising not only for the victim but also for the perpetrator. Ekman on the other hand talks about how the Swedish judicial system does not view sexual crimes as real crimes in the sense that victims are not listened to very often. She also claims that a very small percent of sexual accusations actually go anywhere in the legal process. These comments by the two authors, a man and a woman, can be suggested to be an example of gender typical statements where the man supports the man and the woman

⁸⁴ Manne, p. 66.

⁸⁵ Manne, p. 66.

supports the women. Connecting this to the idea about authority presented in the theoretical framework, it can be suggested that by letting Liljestrand stand for the comments that support Ismail and letting Ekman stand for the opposite, SVT has drawn on existing patriarchal forms of authority. Something which could further this thought is Liljestrand's statements in the article he wrote after the documentary was released, which was presented in the introduction of the essay. He claims his statements in the documentary were reworded and that parts of what he said were cut out, supporting the idea that SVT had deliberately skewed Liljestrand's words in order to draw on patriarchal authority. Banet-Weiser suggests that by drawing on these forms of authority, one can portray a man accused of sexual violence as a victim.

Liljestrand also talks about how Ismail is famous in Sweden, how his name is a brand in itself and how he for many years has been a loved comedian in Sweden. There are also a lot of flashbacks referencing Ismail's career and fame. Adhering to Banet-Weiser's thoughts on how Brock Turner's punishment was measured by his privileges and not his actions it can be argued that the documentary *Persona Non Grata* is doing something similar. As Ismail is portrayed as a famous comedian, loved by many, in these aspects privileged, it can be argued that there is an implication he should not suffer. This would be in accordance with Banet-Weiser's thought that with privilege comes an inclination to a lighter punishment.

It should be mentioned that the comments put forth by author Ekman deviate somewhat from the portrayal of Ismail as a victim. Ekman means that he has not suffered and that he has not been punished. This is a perspective which does not emphasize victimhood. The content analysis also provides an insight into Ismail expressing responsibility, admitting he has hurt people, expressing shame as well as acknowledging that he put himself in this position. This in turn would suggest that SVT sometimes deviates from the more typical portrayals of Ismail as a victim. However, it should be noted that the comments portraying him as a victim are much more prominent than the ones who are not as typically associated with victimhood. It should also be mentioned that the discussion of which emotions are more typically associated with a victim and which ones are more typically associated with a perpetrator, is a much larger one requiring its own context.

5.2 Discussion

I once read a quote by Malcolm X where he said that the media is so powerful that it has the power to make the innocent guilty and the guilty innocent. These words have been an inspiration in writing this essay.

#MeToo has been and continues to be a strong force working to bring awareness and justice to the societal problem of women being sexually harassed or assaulted. As discussed earlier in the essay it has arguably resulted in a backlash. It is within this backlash that the creation of male victimhood has taken place, according to Phipps. Because #MeToo has grown to the remarkable movement that it is today and because of the attention it has gained, I think it is important to be aware of this suggested backlash. It is important to be aware of it but also to deal with it accordingly. According to Phipps it can be suggested that the backlash does women a disservice, and does not help them after all. It can be argued to be counterproductive. It is because of this that it's so important to deal with this supposed backlash and it is essentially why I chose to write this essay.

Something which further promotes the relevance of this research is that the media has a powerful influence over society. It has the power to convey things a certain way, make people believe certain things. Therefore it is highly relevant to be critical of media's portrayal when it comes to an alleged crime as serious as that of sexual assault. It is through the media that many people get their information and their facts about current events. This means that norms and standards are partly set based on the media's portrayals. This in turn means that the media can be argued to have a responsibility to portray an accurate depiction, something which can be easier said than done. In conclusion it means that because the media is so influential it is crucial to view it with a critical eye in order to avoid adopting harmful norms and standards.

In comparing this essay with the previous research presented above, there are a few things which can be found to set them apart. This essay has explored and examined the Swedish national television broadcaster, SVT. SVT is a public service company claiming it "operates in favour of the public and is driven independently of political, commercial and other

interests in society.”⁸⁶ SVT “is financed via the public service-fee.”⁸⁷ One of the articles in the previous research has utilised SVT in its research. However, this was done along with many other Swedish news sources. Thus, this essay provides a more detailed insight into SVT. As SVT is financed by “the public service-fee.”⁸⁸ and aims to provide a somewhat unbiased source of news, it is of high importance to view it with a critical eye, something which this essay has done. This essay has a very specific and narrow focus, where the research concerns one case, one piece of primary material and one media source. This one case has received a lot of attention and a lot of criticism ever since the documentary aired. As I have not found these properties in any previous research this essay can be said to contribute to the discussion of victimhood in the media. Thus, this essay deviates from the previous research in its purpose and its aim. However, they do produce similar findings, which is interesting as it promotes a coherence in this field of research.

Through analyzing the documentary it is evident that there are examples which support the idea that Ismail is portrayed as a victim as well as ones that deviate more from the typical portrayal of a victim. These include comments made by author Ekman who claims Ismail has not fallen, that he has not been punished. There were also several instances when Ismail expressed things like shame or responsibility that are not typically portrayed by a victim. However, through utilizing the results of the content analysis it is evident that typical portrayals of a victim are of a higher frequency than the ones.

If there was to be further research done on this topic it would be interesting to explore more cases of media portrayals of people accused of sexual assault. I would have liked to examine more people who are in the same situation as Ismail and how the media have presented them. Comparing the media’s portrayal in Sweden with that of other countries could also provide insightful knowledge. It would also be interesting to investigate and examine the portrayal of those who accuse someone of sexual assault, those who have allegedly been sexually assaulted. It would be interesting to explore whether SVT has done this and if so how. It

⁸⁶ Original quote: “verkar i allmänhetens tjänst och drivs självständigt i förhållande till politiska, kommersiella och andra intressen i samhället.” Sveriges Television AB. Om Oss, Välkommen till hela Sveriges television!. *SVT*. <https://omoss.svt.se/> (Accessed 2022-01-09).

⁸⁷ Original quote: “finansieras via public service-avgiften.” Sveriges Television AB. Om Oss, SVT:s Roll. *SVT*. <https://omoss.svt.se/> (Accessed 2022-01-09).

⁸⁸ Original quote: “public service-avgiften.” Sveriges Television AB. Om Oss, SVT:s Roll. *SVT*. <https://omoss.svt.se/> (Accessed 2022-01-09).

could provide a useful and more complex insight into the discussion of victimhood in the media.

This essay has allowed me to explore the Swedish media and its portrayals of men accused of sexual assault. It has given me an insight into the allegedly harmful narratives which are used in the media in order to convey victimhood. It has alerted me of a large societal problem, of which I will be much more aware now.

Conclusion

This essay has explored whether SVT depicts Ismail as a victim in their documentary *Persona Non Grata* and if so in what ways. In order to do this, a narrative as well as a content analysis has been utilized. These have been used in accordance with Bergström & Boréus' models from their book on research methods. The theoretical framework that has been used has been based on the research by Banet-Weiser, Manne and Phipps. My research and analysis indicate that Ismail is portrayed as a victim in the documentary *Persona Non Grata*. I would argue that this is done through portraying his life as ruined, evoking sympathy with the viewer, switching the roles of the alleged perpetrator and the alleged victim and by using patriarchal forms of authority.

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Appendices

Content Analysis:

‘Ruined life’:

- Something has been ruined: 12
- Couldn’t see how he could keep living: 1
- The end: 1
- Felt bad in general: 11
- Pictures/ described as unkempt: 8
- Slashed tires: 1
- Losses within his career/status: 12
- Ismail needs help: 1
- Stigmatization: 4
- Accusations are permanent: 6
- Wishing he wasn’t in this position: 1
- People expressing fear he would commit suicide: 5

- Total: 63

‘Good life’:

- Referencing his blossoming career: 13
- Awards he has achieved: 3
- Seeing or hearing his child: 6
- General positive connotations about Ismail: 4
- Total: 26

#MeToo:

- Accused during #MeToo: 1
- #MeToo: 11
- Total: 12

Shame / Responsibility (expressed by Ismail)

- He is ashamed: 1
- Put himself into this position: 2
- It was disrespectful: 1
- Admits to hurting people: 6
- Expressing responsibility: 3
- Total: 13